

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 SP-02 INR-05 CIAE-00
NSAE-00 HA-02 EB-04 TRSE-00 L-01 /044 W
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P R 071930Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6965
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 1841

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GY
SUBJECT: POLITICAL PROSPECTS IN GUYANA

REF: STATE 138939

1. NOW THAT THE GOG HAS SET JULY 10 AS THE DATE FOR THE NATIONAL REFERENDUM WHICH, IF ADOPTED, WILL EMPOWER THE PARLIAMENT TO CHANGE THE PRESENT CONSTITUTION IN WHOLE OR PART BY A SIMPLE 2/3 MAJORITY (WHICH THE RULING PNC ENJOYS), THE TREND OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN GUYANA OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS SEEMS FAIRLY CLEAR. ASSUMING THAT THE REFERENDUM IS APPROVED (AND NO ONE HERE SEEMS IN ANY DOUBT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE BY JUDICIOUS OR INJUDICIOUS RIGGING TO MUSTER A 75PCT APPROVAL FIGURE), THE EXISTING PARLIAMENT WHOSE MANDATE WOULD HAVE EXPIRED JULY 25 UNDER THE OLD CONSTITUTION WILL BE CONVERTED INTO A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND BEGIN WORK ON A NEW CHARTER FOR GUYANA. THIS PROCESS, ACCORDING TO A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN, WILL TAKE ANYWHERE FROM TWELVE TO EIGHTEEN MONTHS.
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ONCE THE NEW CHARTER HAS BEEN COMPLETED THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WILL RECONVERT ITSELF INTO A PARLIAMENT, APPROVE THE NEW DOCUMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE MODIFIED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION. ELECTIONS WILL THEN BE HELD UNDER THE TERMS OF THE NEW CHARTER AND THE REVISED GOVERNMENT OF GUYANA INSTALLED. AS CAN BE SEEN FROM THE FOREGOING

THIS PROCESS WILL TAKE THE BETTER PART OF TWO YEAR, THUS
ENABLING THE BURNHAM GOVERNMENT TO FINESSE THE ELECTION OF
A NEW PARLIAMENT WHICH THE OLD CONSTITUTION STIPULATED BE
HELD NO LATER THAN OCTOBER 25, 1978.

2. THE OPPOSITION TO THE REFERENDUM HAS BEEN FORMIDABLE
AND INCLUDES SUCH DISPARATE ELEMENTS AS DR. CHEDDI JAGAN'S
MARXIST-LINING PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY, THE GUYANA
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE OVERWHELMING
MAJORITY OF LAWYERS IN GUYANA, THE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION,
THE SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTS, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, AND
CERTAIN NON-GOVERNMENT TRADE UNIONS. THIS OPPOSITION HAS
ORGANIZED MEETINGS, HAS PUBLISHED ARTICLES IN THE PPP
DAILY MCCROR AS WELL AS THE WEEKLY CATHOLIC STANDARD,
HAS ATTEMPTED TO PUT PAID ADVERTISEMENT IN THE
GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED DAILIES AND ON THE PRIVATELY
OWNED RADIO STATION (WHICH THE PAPERS AND THE RADIO
STATIONS HAVE REFUSED TO ACCEPT ON ORDERS FROM THE GOG), AND HAS
GENERALLY BUILT UP A WAVE OF OPPOSITION WHICH IS PROBABLY THE STRONG-
EST PRIMIN BURNHAM HAS HAD TO FACE IN THE LAST TEN YEARS.
IT IS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THIS OPPOSITION CAN BE
TRANSLATED INTO ANY EFFECTIVE LEGAL CHALLENGE WHICH
MIGHT BLOCK THE GOVERNMENT'S BLUE PRINT FOR THE POLITICAL
FUTURE OF GUYANA OUTLINED ABOVE. THIS IS DUE TO THE
FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS ALREADY WELL ON THE WAY TOWARD
ORGANIZING AN OVERWHELMING "YES" VOTE IN THE JULY 10
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REFERENDUM BY SUCH DEVICES AS THE REGISTRATION OF A
LARGE AND GENERALLY ANONYMOUS OVERSEAS VOTE AS WELL AS
BY OBTAINING PROXIES FROM THE AMERINDIANS, THE INMATES
OF OLD PEOPLE'S HOMES, AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS WHICH WILL
BE PLACED IN THE BALLOT BOXES EN MASSE ON THE "YES"
SIDE. THE GOVERNMENT HAS EXCLUDED IN THE ELECTORAL LAW
THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY JUDICIAL CHALLENGE TO THE
INDIVIDUAL VOTER OR HIS REGISTRATION. THUS,
DESPITE MUCH BRAVE TALK WITHIN THE RANKS OF THE OPPOSITION,
THERE IS A CLEARLY DISCERNIBLE AIR OF RESIGNATION ABOUT
THE RESULTS OF THE REFERENDUM AND THE POLITICAL FUTURE
OF GUYANA AT THIS TIME. THEY ALL UNDERSTAND AS
GUYANESE AMBASSADOR MANN RECENTLY CONFIRMED TO DEPUTY
ASST. SEC. SHELTON THAT "THE PRIMIN WAS GOING THROUGH
THIS 'PAINFUL' PROCEDURE OF AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION
IN ORDER TO FORESTALL HOLDING ELECTIONS."

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 1841

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3. WHAT WE ARE SEEING IN GUYANA IS THE
ATTEMPT BY BURNHAM AND THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS TO
ASSURE THEIR POLITICAL CONTROL OVER THIS COUNTRY FOR THE FORE-
SEEABLE FUTURE. TO ACHIEVE THIS THEY SEEM EVER WILLING TO
SHARPLY CIRCUMSCRIBE THE DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOMS WHICH
THE GUYANESE HAVE ENJOYED SINCE INDEPENDENCE. IT MUST
BE RECALLED THAT IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN THE BRITISH
SUCCEEDED RATHER REMARKABLY IN CREATING INDEPENDENT
STATES IN WHICH DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES WERE WELL ENTRENCHED.
DESPITE SOME POLITICAL TURBULENCE IN THE INTERVAL SINCE INDE-
PENDENCE WAS GRANTED TO JAMAICA, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO,
BARBADOS AND GUYANA, THE ACCEPTANCE OF DEMOCRACY AND INDEED
ITS CHERISHING BY THE CITIZENS HAS BEEN UNQUESTIONED. IN TWO
OF THOSE COUNTRIES, JAMAICA AND BARBADOS, THERE HAVE BEEN
PEACEFUL TRANSFERS OF POWER FROM ONE PARTY TO ANOTHER THROUGH
THE MECHANISM OF FREE ELECTIONS. THESE THEN ARE NOT
FORMER AFRICAN COLONIES WITH MINIMAL PREPARATION FOR
INDEPENDENCE OR LITTLE APPRECIATION OF THE PRINCIPLES
OF DEMOCRACY AND PERSONAL FREEDOM; THESE ARE NATION-
STATES IN WHICH THOSE TENETS HAVE BEEN WELL ENGRAINED.
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WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE MUST THEREFORE BE DISTURBING NOT
ONLY TO THE GUYANESE WHO OPPOSE WHAT BURNHAM AND THE
PNC ARE ATTEMPTING TO DO, BUT ALSO TO KNOWLEDGEABLE
CITIZENS THROUGHOUT THE CARICOM REGION.

4. NEVERTHELESS, THERE SEEMS NO POSSIBILITY THAT BURNHAM AND THE PNC WILL BE DEFLECTED BY THE OPPOSITION FROM PURSUING THE SCENARIO OUTLINED ABOVE. THERE ARE THREE RESERVATIONS, HOWEVER. FIRST, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS BURNHAM, AND BURNHAM IS THE GOVERNMENT. WHEN HE WAS ABSENT RECENTLY ON HIS 28-DAY, FOUR-NATION TRIP, THE DECISION-MAKING MACHINERY IN THE GOVERNMENT GROUND TO A HALT AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS INCAPABLE OF MEETING IN ANY COHERENT AND EFFECTIVE WAY THE OPPOSITION WHICH BEGAN TO MOUNT AGAINST THE PROPOSAL FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. BURNHAM HAD A SERIOUS HEART ATTACK IN FEBRUARY 1977 AND HE HAS BEEN OPERATING AT A FURIOUS PACE SINCE EARLY APRIL BOTH ON HIS OVERSEAS TRIP AND IN IN PUBLIC APPEARANCES SINCE HIS RETURN. WERE HE TO EXPERIENCE ANOTHER ATTACK THE GOVERNMENT WOULD PROBABLY FALTER DEPENDING UPON ITS SERIOUSNESS. THE SECOND RESERVATION CONCERNS THE STILL TENUOUS ELECTRIC POWER SITUATION IN GEORGETOWN. IN EARLY APRIL, WHEN FOR THE BETTER PART OF A WEEK, THE CAPITAL WAS BLACKED OUT, THERE WERE OBVIOUS SIGNS THAT PUBLIC ORDER WAS BEGINNING TO BREAK DOWN. SHOULD THERE BE A REPETITION--AND IT IS NOT INCONVEIVABLE GIVEN THE FACT THAT THE POWER GENERATING POTENTIAL AVAILABLE TO THE CAPITAL IS STILL UNCERTAIN, AND THE LARGE GENERATING UNITS ORDERED FROM THE UK HAVE NOT YET ARRIVED--THE PUBLIC REACTION TO A SUSTAINED BLACK-OUT AND TO THE SHORTAGE OF BASIC COMMODITIES IT WOULD SURELY CAUSE, COULD CONSPIRE TO EXERT HEAVY AND ALMOST IRRESISTIBLE PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT(AS THE PERCEIVED AUTHOR
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OF THE INCONVENIENCES), AND PRODUCE AN UNSTABLE POLITICAL SITUATION. FINALLY, THERE IS A RUMOR THAT THE UNIONS OPPOSED TO THE REFERENDUM WILL ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE A GENERAL STRIKE BETWEEN NOW AND JULY 10. SHOULD IT BE CALLED AND SHOULD IT BE LARGELY SUCCESSFUL, IT COULD CREATE PRESSURES ON THE GOG AKIN TO THOSE WHICH A GENERAL POWER FAILURE WOULD PRODUCE.

5. IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, HOWEVER, BURNHAM WILL CONTINUE TO ENJOY REASONABLY GOOD HEALTH, PUBLIC UTILITIES WILL LIMP ALONG FURNISHING A LEVEL OF SERVICE JUST BELOW THE THRESHOLD OF REAL PAIN FOR MOST OF THE POPULATION, AND A PROLONGED GENERAL STRIKE WILL NOT SUCCEED. THUS, THE POLITICAL EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS OUTLINED ABOVE WILL COME TO PASS.
BURKE

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